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THE CENTENNIAL OF THE FIRST INAUGURATION OF A PRESIDENT AT THE PERMANENT SEAT OF THE GOVERNMENT.

By SAMUEL CLAGETT BUSEY, M.D.

(Read before the Columbia Historical Society, February 4, 1901.)

In pursuance of the Act of Congress of March 2, 1889 (Sec. 4, Sundry Civil Appropriation Bill), the centennial of the first inauguration of George Washington, which took place in the City of New York, April 30, 1789, was celebrated by the observance of the centennial day as a national holiday throughout the United States, and by the assembling of both Houses of Congress and other officials and dignitaries in the Hall of the House of Representatives, December 11, 1889, to hear the commemorative address delivered by Chief Justice Melville W. Fuller. The City of New York had previously celebrated the centennial anniversary with such civic and military display as to emphasize the fact that Washington remained "first in the hearts of his countrymen." On the fourth of March, 1793, the second inauguration took place in Independence Hall, Philadelphia. It was unattended with the brilliant pageantry and ceremonies which marked the first inauguration, not because of the lessened veneration and gratitude of his countrymen for Washington, but in some measure because it took place in a provincial city, the population of which was, for the most part, composed of people with staid habits and solemn demeanor, and mainly because it was in keeping with the taste and wishes of the President.

The first inauguration of Mr. McKinley took place on the centennial anniversary of the retirement of Washington from public life, a coincidence which did not attract public attention and which might have escaped official observation, but for the circumstance that Senator John B. Gordon, of Georgia, at the suggestion of Judge James B. Embry, of this city, in a brief and pertinent speech, called the attention of the Senate to the fact that the inauguration to take place the next day would occur on the centennial of the retirement of President George Washington from public life. (See appendix.)

The second inauguration of President McKinley will take place on the fourth of March, 1901, the centennial of the first inauguration of a President at the permanent seat of the Government. Mr. Jefferson, who was the Vice-President during the single term of John Adams, and succeeded him, retired from the Senate, and on March 2, addressed the following note to the Honorable Theodore Sedgwick, Speaker of the House of Representatives:

“WASHINGTON, March 2, 1801.

“*Sir*: I beg through you to inform the honorable House of Representatives of the United States, that I shall take the oath that the Constitution prescribes for the President of the United States before entering on the execution of his office, on Wednesday, the fourth instant, at twelve o'clock, in the Senate Chamber.

“I have the honor to be, with great respect, Sir,

“Your most obedient and humble servant,

“THOMAS JEFFERSON.”

The Hon. THEODORE SEDGWICK,

Speaker of the House of Representatives.

The brief and simple story of that event is told in the *National Intelligencer* of March 6, 1801, as follows:

“At an early hour on Wednesday the City of Washington presented a spectacle of uncommon animation, occasioned by the addition to its usual population of a large body of citizens from adjacent districts. A discharge from the company of Washington artillery ushered in the day, and about 10 o'clock the Alexandria company of riflemen, with the company of artillery, paraded in front of the President's lodgings.

“At 12 o'clock Thomas Jefferson, attended by a number of his fellow-citizens, among whom were many members of Congress, repaired to the Capitol. His dress was, as usual, that of a plain citizen, without any distinctive badge of office.

“He entered the Capitol under a discharge of artillery.

“On his entry into the Senate Chamber, there were assembled the Senate and the members of the House of Representatives. The members rose, and Mr. Burr left the Chair of the Senate, which Mr. Jefferson took.

“After a few minutes of silence, Mr. Jefferson rose and delivered his address before the largest concourse of citizens ever assembled here. After seating himself for a short period, he again rose and approached the clerk's table, where the oath of office was administered by the Chief Justice; after which he returned to his lodgings, accompanied by the Vice-President, Chief Justice, and heads of Departments, where he was waited upon by a number of distinguished citizens.

“As soon as he withdrew, a discharge of artillery was made. The remainder of the day was devoted to festivity, and at night there was a pretty general illumination.

“Neither Mr. Adams nor Theodore Sedgwick, Speaker of the House of Representatives, were present at the inaugural ceremony; both these gentlemen having left the city at daylight on that morning.”

The above account appeared in the *Aurora* newspaper in Philadelphia March 11, 1801; and also, with the omission of the last paragraph, as a preface in a pamphlet edition of the inaugural speech issued in Philadelphia for Mathew Carey in the year of 1801.

It thus appears to have been a very formal but unpretentious ceremony, in which the President was the chief and only conspicuous personage, and so arranged as to bring that one person all the more distinctly into view.

Mr. Jefferson walked to the Capitol and from the Capitol back to his lodgings, which, as shown by the following extracts from the *Intelligencer*, were located on New Jersey Avenue, Southeast:

“Conrad and McMunn have opened houses of entertainment in the range of buildings formerly occupied by Mr. Law, about two hundred paces from the Capitol, in New Jersey Avenue, leading from thence to the Eastern Branch. They are spacious and convenient, one of which is designed for stage passengers and travellers, the other for the accommodation of boarders. There is stabling sufficient for 20 horses. They hope to merit public patronage.” (*National Intelligencer*, Nov. 24, 1800.)

“Last evening arrived in Washington, Thomas Jefferson, Vice-President of the United States, and took up his lodging in Messrs. Conrad and McMunn’s apartments.” (*National Intelligencer*, Nov. 28, 1800.)

“Yesterday the President of the United States removed from Messrs. McMunn’s and Conrad’s to the President’s House.” (*National Intelligencer*, March 20, 1801.)

The record is, therefore, complete that he reached his lodgings November 27, 1800, and continued to occupy the same as late as March 20, 1801. These lodgings were located in one of the three adjoining and substantially built brick houses, at the northwest corner of New Jersey Avenue and C Street, Southeast. They were built by Thomas Law, and at the time of Mr. Jefferson’s first inauguration were occupied as boarding houses. Subsequently the Government leased them for the Coast Survey, and other branches of the service. Later they

were converted into a hotel, known as the Law House, now as The Varnum.\*

The foregoing statement and circumstances seem to disprove the statement of an English traveller, named Davis,† who as an eye witness writes as follows:

“Let us come to the object of our journey to Washington. The politeness of a member from Virginia procured me a convenient seat in the Capitol; and an hour after, Mr. Jefferson entered the House, when the assembly of American Senators rose to receive him. He came, however, to the House without ostentation. His dress was of plain cloth, and he rode on horseback to the Capitol without a single guard, or even servant in his train, dismounted without assistance, and hitched his bridle to the palisades.”

This story has been restated so often during the century and so frequently repeated by recent writers, the popular belief in its truth has become so widespread that many are unwilling to accept its denial. And as a matter of fact, the Davis story of the horseback ride and hitching post did have its counterpart at a later date. Mr. Jefferson walked into the office of President and rode on horseback out of it. Miss Sarah, the daughter of Thomas Jefferson Randolph, in writing of her father, says:

“At Madison’s first inauguration he was a lad of seventeen years, and was his grandfather’s sole companion as he rode, in those days of republican simplicity, up Pennsylvania Avenue on horseback from the President’s House to the Capitol, where grandson and grandfather dismounted, hitched their horses to the palings, and the latter went into the Congressional hall to see the Government pass from his hands to those of his friend.”‡

\* “A Biographical Sketch of Thomas Law,” by Allen C. Clark 1900, p. 25.

† “Davis’s Travels in America,” 1803, p. 177.

‡ “Our Early Presidents, Their Wives and Children,” 1891, p. 1800.

He entered the Hall of the House of Representatives about\* the time Mr. Madison left his private residence in this city, F Street, between Thirteenth and Fourteenth Streets, N. W., accompanied by the military and civic escort. The *Travels in America* by Davis was published in London, in 1803. He could not, therefore, have connected his story with Mr. Jefferson's eccentric escapade of March 4, 1809. It is not, however, improbable that the latter event has added such force to the story of Davis as to create and maintain the popular belief.

It was not, however, writes Mrs. Upton,† the original intention of Mr. Jefferson to inaugurate the regime of "Republican Simplicity" without pomp and display.

She adds:

"Mr. Jefferson himself, like Washington, was fond of horses, handsome equipages and handsome dress, despite what has been said of his republican simplicity. He may have ridden horseback up to the Capitol for his inauguration, as goes the myth, but he meant to have a fine coach-and-four for the occasion—only Jacky Eppes did not get to Washington with them in season. He may sometimes have been carelessly attired, but often he flashed out, in contemporaneous record, in his white coat, scarlet breeches and vest, and white silk hose, fit to figure on a Watteau fan."

The accession of Mr. Jefferson was the climax of a bitter and fierce political contest between the Federal and Republican parties, the issues of which were, in some respects, not unlike those of the last election. The electoral college failed to make a choice, and the duty developed upon the House of Representatives, which after a protracted controversy chose Thomas Jefferson. The Republican party came into power under the lead-

\* *National Intelligencer*, March 6, 1809.

† "Our Early Presidents, Their Families and Children," p. 177.

ership of its ablest and most experienced statesman, who had filled during many years of continued service, many high places. The time and circumstances were rife with evil forebodings, but notwithstanding the bitterness and partisan rancor of the popular controversy, the failure of the electoral college to make a choice and the strain of the final struggle in the House of Representatives, the simple and unostentatious inauguration testified to the abiding faith of the people in a government by the people and for the people, and, so likewise, will the coming Centennial Anniversary attest the confidence of a law-abiding people in the stability of the Government.

The first inauguration of Mr. Jefferson was the beginning of the era of "Republican simplicity," which he sought to establish as the rule and guide of official life. His intense aversion to monarchical Government and detestation of court etiquette and ceremonies led him into the extreme of social simplicity and informality. He fought the phantom of imperialism with the shibboleth of social equality, and sought to abolish the system of official and ceremonial intercourse formulated and put into practice by Washington, which with slight modifications continues in operation at the present time. He abolished the drawing-rooms of Washington and John Adams, but held two receptions, New Year's Day and the Fourth of July. Everybody was admitted without regard to order, or rank, or the comfort of the guests. Persons were also permitted to call at other times as they might please. He was always accessible to those who wished to see the President, socially or officially. Mr. Jefferson did not, however, abolish the State dinners. They took place as usual, and were conducted with quite as much ceremony as during the administration of Washington and John Adams. The fact that Mrs. Madison, the wife of the Secretary of State, some-



times assisted by one of his daughters who might be on a visit to the President, presided on such occasions, is conclusive assurance, if any were needed, that the State dinners did not lack in any of the appointments of elegant refinement and ceremony of cultured people in high social life.

Contemporary writers agree in the statement that Mr. Jefferson always appeared in public in the dress of an unostentatious citizen. At the first inauguration the *Intelligencer* says "his dress was that of a plain citizen without any distinctive badge of office." His dress as he rode to the Capitol, writes Davis, "was of plain cloth." Senator Mitchel,\* of New York, who attended Mr. Jefferson's first New Year's Day reception, January, 1802, in a gossipy letter to his wife, writes: "His dress and manners are very plain; he is grave, or rather sedate, but without any tincture of pomp, ostentation or pride, and occasionally can smile, and both hear and relate humorous stories as well as any other man of social feelings."

The Senator is also responsible for the statement that President Jefferson had generally eight or ten persons to dine with him every day. "The dinner was neat and plentiful," and the company "was easy and sociable." No healths were drunk at the table nor any toasts of sentiments given after dinner. Every one drank as he pleased and conversed at his ease. "In this way every guest drank to the digestive or social point and no further."

Senator Mitchel seems to have been a favorite guest at many social dinners and on other notable occasions, which gave him opportunities for observation which could not have been enjoyed by many, but he fails to note the crude and discourteous innovations and infor-

\* *Harper's Magazine*, April, 1879, p. 746.

malities alleged to have characterized social and official life during the regime of republican simplicity. His description of the gala appearance of the city on New Year's Day, 1802, when its streets were crowded with ladies and gentlemen going to and from the President's mansion, some in carriages and many on foot; of the throng of elite and fashionable people at the White House; and of the simple and dignified manner of the President, are in marked contrast with the critics, who have contemptuously described the public receptions as mob-like assemblages of Jefferson's commune.

With the incoming of Mr. Madison's administration the social upheaval ceased. Mr. Jefferson retired to Monticello, and society swung back into the routine of class distinctions and ceremonial intercourse, with the restoration of the earlier functions and formalities of social and official life.

President McKinley's eventful career has brought him in conspicuous connection with two notable centennial epochs, first, the retirement of Washington from public life, and second, the removal of the Government to its permanent seat. A third will occur with his second inauguration on the centennial anniversary of the first inauguration at the permanent seat of the Government. The latter is the most significant, inasmuch as it will sharpen and emphasize the contrast between the simple and unostentatious ceremonies of Jefferson's first inauguration and the pageantry and display of its centennial anniversary, for which such elaborate preparations are now being made. The difference will be in degree and extent commensurate with the growth of the country in population, wealth, power and international influence, and will give expression to the gratitude and enthusiasm of a patriotic people.

APPENDIX.

*Remarks of HON. JOHN B. GORDON of Georgia, embracing  
a communication from Judge James H. Embry, in the  
Senate March 3, 1897, on the centennial of  
the retirement of President Washing-  
ton from public life and the  
congress of that era.*

MR. GORDON. Mr. President, I think no man on the floor of the Senate taxes this body less often than myself. I do not wish to make a speech, but I do ask unanimous consent for a few moments' indulgence in order to explain a rather unusual communication which I am about to present. If this consent is granted, the Senate will discover that while the purpose which I have in view is rather sentimental and patriotic than practical for this late hour of the session, yet it is neither an idle nor improper object.

One hundred years ago, Mr. President, in Congress Hall, Philadelphia, was witnessed an inaugural ceremony which I will not say was in strange, but certainly it was in striking, contrast with the one upon which we are to look in this Capitol to-morrow.

The incidents and facts connected with that scene and some most interesting facts connected with that early period of our history have been collated and described by that accomplished gentleman and patriotic citizen, Judge James H. Embry, of this city, in a communication to myself, which I ask the Senate to have printed in the RECORD.

Mr. President, it will be recalled that in Congress Hall, on the 4th of March, 1797, stood George Washington making his farewell address to public life and to official connection with his country. Another figure which appeared upon that scene, certainly not less picturesque and scarcely less eminent, was John Adams, who was to assume the Presidential office. It will do no harm in this period of our country's power and splendor and upon this centennial to place in the record of our proceedings some account of that remarkable scene.

It was the "farewell" of the man who was first designated by Light Horse Harry Lee, the father of Gen. Robert E. Lee, "First in war, first in peace, and first in the hearts of his countrymen"; the permanent retirement of that man of whom Mr. Jefferson said that his fame would go on increasing through the centuries until some constellation in the heavens would be called after him. The prediction of Mr. Jefferson will probably never be realized, but we will all agree, I think, as will all the liberty-loving of our race, that Washington's name will not be forgotten while any of that race shall survive or republican institutions live.

The other figure to whom I allude was John Adams, who with his thundering words had done for American independence and freedom what Mr. Jefferson had done with his pen and what Washington had enforced with his guns—the man who Mr. Jefferson declared was our Colossus on the floor of Congress.

It will do no harm to revive the picture of the scene in that little hall in Philadelphia one hundred years ago, when George Washington, in his severely plain black suit, stood amidst his weeping hearers, bidding his farewell to all official connection with his country. It will do no harm to have our children recall John Adams, in his no less severely plain drab suit, as he sat with his ruffle-bound hands covering his face, wet with tears, as the father of his country was uttering those solemn, golden, and ever-memorable words.

Mr. President, begging the pardon of the Senate, realizing the fact that this is no time for speech making, I ask that this paper, which I think is worthy of preservation, be printed in the RECORD as a part of my remarks.

The VICE-PRESIDENT. Is there objection? The Chair hears none, and it is so ordered.

The paper is as follows:

WASHINGTON, D. C., *March 2, 1897.*

MY DEAR SIR: May I remind you that time's tireless march will bring us in a few hours to the centennial of one of the marked epochs of our national life—the retirement of the

illustrious Washington from public life; the surrender by him of the great trust of the Presidential office, and the first successful experiment of free government within the Western Hemisphere. It is well to pause and contemplate the nation, then an infant, and now a giant, and in imagination to picture it a century hence, when a population of hundreds of millions between the two oceans that bathe our shores, preserving, as we all devoutly hope, the blessings and liberties we this day enjoy, shall be prepared to hand to another century our Constitution unimpaired, and our Federal Union unbroken. Just a century ago, besides the original thirteen States, three stars had been added to our flag, and Vermont, Kentucky, and Tennessee had taken their places in the great assembly of American Commonwealths. Virginia had, with royal munificence, dedicated to the nation the Northwest Territory, an area larger than the British Isles, and had given the fairest portion of her domain—Kentucky—to become one of the sisterhood of States. The invitation to become a State of the Federal Union was extended to Kentucky before it was to Vermont. The sixteen States of the Federal Union just a century ago had a population not exceeding 5,000,000; now forty-five American Commonwealths contain a population of about 75,000,000.

Many questions, foreign and domestic, confronted Congress during the Administrations of Washington. With affection for his memory, with reverence for his character, and with a warm appreciation of his advice and counsel, the Senate pauses in its deliberations to hear and ponder his Farewell Address to his countrymen, and to place it anew upon its records, that millions may again read its patriotic utterances and be imbued with his spirit of intense devotion to the public weal.

As we look back at the record of our national life a century ago, we find Congress sitting in Philadelphia—a city then of less than 40,000 population. The first Congress ever assembled on the Western Hemisphere met in that city on the 5th of September, 1774, and the great Declaration was proclaimed within its limits. The British forces occupied the city from

September, 1777, to June, 1778, the battle of Germantown having been fought October 4, 1777. From 1790 to 1800, the city of Philadelphia was the seat of government of the United States. It is interesting to note some of the proceedings of Congress near the close of Washington's last Administration—just a century ago. Assembling then as now on the first Monday of December, instead of sending a message, President Washington appeared on December 7, 1796, in the Chamber of the House of Representatives, where the Senate had already assembled, and addressed the two Houses. On the 10th, the Senate transmitted an address to the President in answer to his speech, and on the 16th the members of the House in a body waited upon the President at his residence, and the Speaker, on their behalf, delivered an address to the President. On February 8, 1797, the two Houses assembled in the Representatives' Chamber and counted the votes for President and Vice-President. On the 15th, John Adams, the President-elect, addressed the Senate on his retirement from that body for the remainder of the session, and on the 22d the Senate made answer to the address. On March 1st the Senate considered a bill the President had vetoed, to amend the act "to ascertain and fix the military establishment of the United States." On March 2d a bill was considered by the Senate for the relief and protection of American seamen. On Saturday, March 4th, President Washington issued a summons to the Senate to meet in their Chamber at 10 o'clock to receive any communication which the President may lay before them.

On December 14, 1796, a bill was discussed in the House to report the debates. A member inquired the cost, and thought "the expense altogether unnecessary." He said that if the debates of the House were printed, and four or five copies given to each member, they would employ all the mails of the United States. The question was debated at some length. On March 1, 1797, the questions of duties on distilled spirits and protection to American seamen were discussed in the House. On March 2 a bill making appropriations for the military establishment was discussed, and among the items agreed to

was one "for the payment of the Army, \$256,450." Naval appropriations were also discussed, and Mr. Smith, a member from South Carolina, proposed to add \$172,000 for finishing the three frigates *United States*, *Constitution*, and *Constellation*, but Mr. Nicholas opposed the appropriation of so large a sum. On March 3 sundry bills were passed, and an evening session was held. The last hours were occupied in a debate upon a resolution expressing sympathy for the sufferings of General Lafayette in his long and rigorous imprisonment, and as to measures that should be adopted toward effecting his restoration to liberty. Mr. Livingston reminded the House that Lafayette "came here from the pompous ease of a foreign court; he voluntarily served the cause of America and bled for her"; that "besides spending a princely fortune in our cause, he asked nothing, nor would accept any compensation for his services." For want of time, no final action was taken upon the resolution, and about 11 o'clock on the evening of March 3 the House adjourned sine die.

The morning of March 4th had arrived, and Congress Hall, on Chestnut Street, in which Congress held its sessions, was the spot to which all eyes were turned. Close by stood, anchored to the earth, the most sacred temple on American soil—"the Runnymede of our nation"—old Independence Hall, the refuge and the rock of the fathers of the Revolution. Before noon time the members of the Senate, conducted by the Vice-President, Thomas Jefferson, who had just taken the oath of office, and accompanied by the officers of the Federal and State Governments and a vast concourse of eminent citizens, repaired to the Hall of the House of Representatives, where a large audience of ladies and gentlemen had assembled to witness the ceremonies. What an imposing assemblage of illustrious men, representatives of the States and of the people—among them James Madison, Albert Gallatin, Fisher Ames, Andrew Jackson, John Langdon, Richard Stockton, and John Laurence—gathered there in the nation's infancy to witness the retirement to private life of the most eminent citizen of the Republic, and to participate in the ceremonies of clothing with the power and authority of the Presidential

office John Adams, the most distinguished citizen of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Near the Speaker's chair sat Thomas Jefferson, whom Adams had called twenty years before the man with "the masterly pen." In front of the Speaker's chair sat Chief Justice Ellsworth, who was to administer the oath, and with him three other judges of the Supreme Court—Cushing, Wilson, and Iredell. Very soon loud cheering was heard in the streets, and in a few moments Washington entered the Chamber, followed by Adams. The whole audience arose and greeted them with enthusiastic cheers. The historian tells us that when they were seated perfect silence reigned, and Washington arose, with the most commanding dignity and self-control, and proceeded to read in a firm, clear voice a brief valedictory. He wore a full suit of black. Mr. Adams wore a full suit of bright drab, with lash or loose cuffs to his coat, and wrist ruffles. The audience listened to Washington in breathless silence, as if they "desired to hear him breathe and catch his breath in homage of their hearts." While Washington was speaking, Adams covered his face with both hands, the sleeves of his coat being moistened with tears. Washington was composed until the close of the address, but when nervous sobs broke loose and tears covered the faces of the audience, the great man was shaken.

Look at the mighty men grouped together in that single Chamber—Washington, the foremost figure of the human race, his name as imperishable "as if it were written between Orion and the Pleiades"; Jefferson and Adams, "the pen and the tongue, the masterly author and the no less masterly advocate of the Declaration." Besides these were others standing beside them whose fame will be as enduring as our language or our liberties. What a scene for an artist, what a theme for the historian. With what joy would Chatham, who bravely defended the cause of the Colonies, have looked down upon that presence. With what majestic eloquence would Edmund Burke again have thrilled the British House of Commons, as he did twenty years before, when he reminded the ministry that the close affection which grows from kindred



blood and from equal privileges and protection "are ties which, though light as air, are as strong as links of iron." A few whose names will survive while our language is spoken and our liberties are preserved were not there. Old Samuel Adams, with hands of iron and nerves of steel, the Martin Luther of the Revolution, was absent. Patrick Henry, whose voice had thrilled the Colonies with its magnetic eloquence—declared by Jefferson to be the greatest orator that ever lived, and by John Randolph to be "Shakespeare and Garrick combined"—offered by Washington the Chief Justiceship of the United States, was not there.

Thus just a century ago closed the official career of our great Washington. He had enjoyed the unbounded confidence of his countrymen. Almighty God had raised him up to lead the armies of the Revolution, and had given him wisdom and courage to meet the dangers and perils that surrounded the colonies in their struggle for liberty. In peace he had guided the first footsteps of the young nation, and stood a faithful sentinel to guard its life against every peril. Advancing years and his earnest desire to retire to the grateful shades of his own Mount Vernon prompted him to surrender to his countrymen the great trust committed to his care; and in words of affection, of tenderness and love, of deepest solicitude for their welfare and prosperity, and for the maintenance, growth, progress, power, and supremacy of the nation, he left the true impress of his great heart and mind in his last earnest messages of advice and counsel to his countrymen.

With great respect,

JAMES H. EMBRY.

Hon. JOHN B. GORDON,  
*Senator from Georgia.*